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r/murderbot • 1 yr. ago

Night\_Runner



## Is there an explanation for the retcon of book 5's ending?..

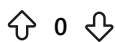
I've read the entire MB series, though I may have missed one of the accompanying short stories. I liked book 5: it was a little long, but it introduced something that scared even MB, and it had a self-contained plot that wrapped up nicely toward the end. (MB aboard ART, telling Mensah that it wants to work with ART's humans now, but it might still visit Preservation.)

Then there was book 6 - which, I assumed, took place during MB's visit to Preservation after that big conversation at the end of book 5. A little weird, but okay. I've double-checked, and book 6 had no indication anywhere that it was all just a giant flashback sequence that had happened at some point before book 5.

...and then book 7 behind with MB playing tag with an agbot on the planet from book 5, as if MB had never left the planet, hadn't gone a-flying with ART (at the end of book 5, MB was onboard ART, in space, and, IIRC, heading for the wormhole), etc. At no point in book 7 is there even a single throwaway sentence like "We were just about to go through the wormhole when ART detected more BE shuttles and told us we had to make an emergency landing on the planet to help the colonists." We get pages and pages and passages of descriptions of how the rails and the tunnels at the second settlement work. (I'm sorry, but I literally fell asleep reading that part LOL. Multiple times...) But we don't get a simple explanation that ties the end of book 5 to the beginning of book 7 and explains where book 6 fits in with all of this.

(Also, fun fact: if you google "Murderbot Diaries reading order," all the top results still show you 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. 🙄)

I've searched his sub for "retcon" and "retconned" and I haven't found a whole lot... Did Wells explain any of this in some interview before book 7 came out? I feel like I'm missing some key and vital piece of information here. :)



0



61



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RandomsComments • 1y ago

There's no retcon. Fugitive Telemetry was always a prequel, set before Network Effect. It's about events that are referred to in Network Effect.



21



Reply



Night\_Runner OP • 1y ago



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I'm not making it up - here's the official book list from Wells's publisher: <https://us.macmillan.com/series/themurderbotdiaries>

The publisher describes Fugitive Telemetry as: "A standalone adventure in the New York Times and USA Today-bestselling, Hugo and Nebula Award-winning series." Nothing in that description says "prequel" or "flashback" or anything close to it.

As for the retcon issue: book 5 clearly and explicitly ends with a) MB telling Mensah it wants to go on missions with ART now, and b) ART asking MB if it wants to go on a mission with it. To me, the implication was that a) they were done with the planet mission, and b) the new mission was going to be somewhere else, doing something else. If we yeet book 6 out of the continuity :) then **the very next thing that happens** is MB running around on the planet again, with zero explanation as to why it's there, or whether that's what ART had meant when it said it had a new mission. To me, at least, that was confusing as hell.

0

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**mobyhead1** • 1y ago

Easier to refer the books by title. *Network Effect* was published before "Fugitive Telemetry" but is set after it. "System Collapse" is set after *Network Effect*.

There is no retcon.

63

Reply



**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

Okay, maybe I should have split my post into two. I can accept that book 6 was a fever dream where MB just decided to recount a thing that had happened in the past. Fine. :)

But there's still the retcon issue with book 5's ending. Book 5 clearly and explicitly ends with a) MB telling Mensah it wants to go on missions with ART now, and b) ART asking MB if it wants to go on a mission with it. To me, the implication was that a) they were done with the planet mission, and b) the new mission was going to be somewhere else, doing something else. If we yeet book 6 out of the continuity :) then **the very next thing that happens** is MB running around on the planet again, with zero explanation as to why it's there, or whether that's what ART had meant when it said it had a new mission. To me, at least, that was confusing as hell.

-24

Reply

7 more replies

[deleted] • 1y ago • Edited 1y ago

Everyone covers the book order problem but basically



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wormhole and now: "So we were waiting to see who showed up first." To the surprise of everyone, it was Preservation (Mensah), who didn't wait for a "help" message but just raced after their hijacked ship (from the very start of Network Effect). Everyone settles in and Preservation starts helping ART's crew try to save the colonists from Barish-Estranza through legal maneuvers. Everyone is still waiting for University or Barish-Estranza backup to arrive; they aren't trying to leave the system. Leaving the system might concede the planet to their opponents.

SC begins in medias res with MB on the planet. There are then flashbacks that explain how it got to that point -- the earliest flashback is only hours? days? after the end of NE.

25

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

Hmm. That kiiiinda makes sense haha - perhaps there was a critical mass of flashbacks and my internal chronology got all mixed up.

Re-reading the final chapter of book 5, and you're correct - thank you :) - it does say that both ART and BE stood by to see whose reinforcements will arrive first. It was still a super-jarring transition, though, from "let's hang out in space and see whose lawyers get here first - and hey, maybe let's go on a mission together :) " to "here I am, running around on this planet and killing these ag-bots again."

The ending of book 5 had made it sound as if the situation on the planet (ag-bots and all) had been stabilized, and they just needed to wait for the lawyers...

...or maybe I'm just constitutionally incapable of following multi-layer plotlines that are all about lawyers and politics. I had a similar issue with Star Wars Episode I: I watched it sooo many times, trying to understand what the deal was with the blockade and why the Jedi had to interfere in what was essentially an economic dispute, and why a pacifist princess had a gun hidden in her throne 🤔 - this weird transition left the same taste in my mouth...

0

Reply

6 more replies

**Just\_A\_Faze** • 1y ago

They are out of order. Its fugitive telemetry and then network effect. That's the chronology. No retcon, just that it was on preservation and helping out before it new going back to art was an option

8

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

.....maybe I'm just an old-fashioned dinosaur, but if book B gets released after book A, and it is not stated anywhere that book B is actually a story from the earlier times, then I kinda expect book B to be chronologically after book A. 🤔



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Because it reeeeeeally feels like Wells wrote book 5, set it as a standalone novel, then write book 6 (without claiming that it'd taken place before book 5), and then decided to just continue the planetary adventure in book 7 while the initial plan may have been different...

In any case, I just feel bad for the brand new MB readers who pick up book 7 without having read book 5. That must be particularly confusing for them. 🙄

-5

Reply

**RandomsComments** • 1y ago

I mean typically you don't pick up a "book 7" without having read the prior books and expect to understand everything?

MB isn't post-Network Effect and having a flashback in Fugitive Telemetry -- the whole thing is set at the same time, after the novellas. It's not like All Systems Red, etc., are being recited from a decade in the future.

If Wells intended Fugitive Telemetry to be set after Network Effect, ART would, you know, actually be in it. And it wouldn't be MB's initial encounter with certain security officers MB knows well in Network Effect. And MB wouldn't be taking a job for the first time that it has had for a while at the start of Network Effect. And it wouldn't be on Preservation, since MB isn't heading back there at the end of Network Effect.

I'm not blaming you for being confused, but there's a ton of textual evidence for the story order and Wells isn't retconning or trying to be confusing here.

9

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

without having read prior books and expect to understand everything?

A lot of top-rated reviews of this book on Goodreads state that 7 is a standalone book. 🙄 You'd think that reviews with objectively false information would get downvoted instead of upvoted, but we live in a very strange world.

The whole thing is set at the same time, after the novellas

All those books except for 5 and 7 are novellas. :) Call me a dinosaur, but if book 5 ends with a "let's just wait for our reinforcements to arrive, yay" and is followed by a book 6 (which does not, anywhere, in any way state that it's a prequel or a flashback, etc), then personally, my natural inclination would be to believe that the story I am reading now is something that happened after the story that had just ended. 🙄

Another commenter said that for whatever reason, the publication order between 5 and 6 got a little mixed up. That's cool - but just include that in literally any "MB reading order" list out





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Can we all not agree that it's better and easier to read 2 connected books right after one another, instead of sandwiching a different book in the middle? Literally every reading-order list I found suggests otherwise.

2

Reply

5 more replies

**Just\_A\_Faze** • 1y ago

Its publication order, but Martha Wells has been clear that FT is after ES. Its FT, the NE, then SC.

7

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

I could not find a single Google result where that reading order is described... Seriously, just google "Murderbot Diaries reading order" - not the publication order but the reading order - they all go 5, 6, 7. No footnotes or disclaimers of any kind. 🙄

-4

Reply

**mobyhead1** • 1y ago • Edited 1y ago

[STOP googling and refer to the Wikipedia article instead.](#)

The first book of the series, All Systems Red, was published in May 2017. A sequel, Artificial Condition, was released on May 8, 2018, followed by Rogue Protocol on August 7, 2018. The next installment, Exit Strategy, was released on October 2, 2018. Wells noted in 2017 that the four novellas "do have an overarching story, with the fourth one bringing the arc to a conclusion." A full-length Murderbot novel, Network Effect, was released on May 5, 2020. **Fugitive Telemetry, taking place chronologically between Exit Strategy and Network Effect, was published in April 2021.** A seventh novel, System Collapse, was released on November 14, 2023.

*[Emphasis mine]*

8

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

Huh. Interesting and useful. Doesn't come up on the first page of Google results, though. :( I love wikipedia as much as anyone, but I'd say most people (myself included) use Google vs Wikipedia when they need to find some information fast.

Thanks for confirming that at least one place online isn't trying to mislead the readers. :)

-1

Reply



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I know. I found out from an interview. But I read all the books several times (ok, maybe a dozen or so each) and the little clues become a little easier to spot after multiple readings.

2

Reply

**Fenvara** • 1y ago

Copy of an answer I gave someone else who has asked for the chronological order.

True Chronological Order

Obsolescence - So in "Exit Strategy" Murderbot describes a show it is watching as "... a long historical drama about early human exploration in space. ... It was odd to see that there had been a variation of SecUnits back then. They didn't use cloned human parts, but actual human parts from humans who had catastrophic injuries or illnesses, and had decided to have their parts used for what they called Augmented Rovers...", ECT. - (Obsolescence takes place during this time period)

Compulsory - This is a quick 5 minute read, and gives some insight into how watching "The Rise and Fall of Sanctuary Moon" first allowed Murderbot to truly empathize with humans. Compulsory takes place soon after Murderbot hacked it's governor module. (It is watching episode 44 Sanctuary Moon for the first time)

All Systems Red

Artificial Condition

Rogue Protocol

Exit Strategy

Home: Habitat, Range, Niche, Territory -

This is about a 15 minute read. It is a single short story, not a collection as the title kind of implies, and is from Dr. Ayda Mensah's POV rather than Murderbots.

Fugitive Telemetry - Murder mystery...in Spaaaaace!

Network Effect - FYI because this one is a full length novel, not a novella, the pacing may read a bit slower than the others in the series.

System Collapse - If you haven't already read the description for this book, DON'T. It contains spoilers for Network Effect. This book will not be available until Nov, 14, 2023 :(

Also Martha has confirmed that she has least two more Murderbot books planned.

3

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago



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1

Reply

**azssf** • 1y ago

In publishing terms, Wells could not get the Fugitive Telemetry story fleshed out in her head, but she could do the network effect story. While developing network effect, she realized it required more info. In the end what we know as network effect was published first; she was then able to develop fugitive telemetry even though it happens chronologically before network effect; then she wrote the story she had originally thought would be network effect ( what we now know as System Collapse).

TL;DR: Writing was hard, things ended up out of order and were published in non-story-chrono-order

8

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

That makes sense - thank you. :) I suspected that something hadn't gone according to plan, I just couldn't find the details on any surface-level sites.

5

Reply

**ucat97** • 1y ago

One of the things I've enjoyed about reading SF over the years is discovering the story, universe, characters, plot, technology, etc as you read rather than having everything laid out for you like you need a narrator to tell you everything at the beginning.

7

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

You're talking to someone who unironically enjoys the user-hostile nature of the first Dune novel, with its 100-page dictionary in the back. :P

I just... Is it so much to ask for the entire internet to stop gaslighting readers and to say, "yeah, so the publication order isn't the reading order. Don't read books 4-5-6-7, read 4-6-5-7 instead." Literally every single site I found when I searched "Murderbot Diaries reading order" suggested sandwiching book 6 in between 5 and 7 when you read them. Every last one. :)

That's just... apathetic neglect at best, and deliberate trolling at worst.

1

Reply

**ucat97** • 1y ago

Having read them in publication order, I still believe it's valid to do so. You can see the character progression and better understand how MB wins the final fight having gone back.

2

Reply



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when 7 is a direct continuation of 5, with all those characters, etc? I mean, if time isn't an issue and you can devour a book a day, I understand, maybe - but most people take a few days, or a week, or more to chip away at a book. :)

From what I understand now, the strange publication order was mostly an accident and not deliberate. Are you suuuure you're not just coming up with an internal head-canon to justify the weirdness of that order? ;) For example, why not read books 3 and 4 in addition to book 6 after you finish book 5 and before you start book 7? 🙄

0

Reply

2 more replies

**Night\_Sky\_Watcher** • 1y ago

Top 1% Commenter

When asked about reading order and when recommending The Murderbot Diaries series, I always note that *Fugitive Telemetry* (book 6) should be read before *Network Effect* (book 5). After writing NE, Martha Wells decided that there was too big a gap in how Murderbot developed a working relationship with Preservation Station Security after *Exit Strategy*, as demonstrated in NE's flashback Help.Me.File sections. Apparently I just need to explain this over and over and over again....

2

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

No need to explain it individually - just gotta hack (or gently convince) all the "Murderbot Diaries reading order" sites that out NE before the FE, as if the publication order were the reading order. 🤪

-1

Reply

**Ypier** • 1y ago

If you read the Wikipedia article for the series, it explains the correct in-world chronological reading order. Just saying.

3

Reply

**Night\_Runner** OP • 1y ago

I agree, yes, it's just that I (like most others) intuitively go to Google to get quick answers to simple questions.

-2

Reply



r/murderbot • 15 days ago

**Adam Savage** spreading the word.



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## Murderbot fans famously devoted

139 upvotes · 13 comments



r/murderbot • 7 days ago

## 9,000 members!

282 upvotes · 108 comments



r/murderbot • 1 mo. ago

## Anyone else waiting to see how Apple handles Murderbot's casual, and continuous copyright theft?

195 upvotes · 51 comments



r/murderbot • 24 days ago

## I wish I could watch The Rise and Fall of Sanctuary Moon.

243 upvotes · 36 comments



r/murderbot • 22 days ago

## She smiled. "Thank you." (And that was that.)

157 upvotes · 18 comments



r/murderbot • 12 days ago

## It came. I'm definitely committed now.

156 upvotes · 11 comments



r/Hungergames • 1 yr. ago

### SPOILER

## I re-read the book, here's my interpretation of the ending now. spoilers obviously.

36 upvotes · 2 comments



r/TowerDefenseSimulator • 1 yr. ago

## Was Act 3's writing secretly... Good? (Theory)

7 upvotes · 10 comments



r/Warhammer40k • 1 yr. ago

### SPOILER


## I read the new book about Cypher, am I the only one disapointed by the ending ?

4 upvotes · 8 comments

SPOILER

Just finished the first book (ACOTAR spoilers in this thread). Is there a discussion thread for JUST the first book that is spoiler free for the rest of the series?

2 comments

 r/acotar • 1 yr. ago

SPOILER

Just finished the first book (ACOTAR spoilers in this thread). Is there a discussion thread for JUST the first book that is spoiler free for the rest of the series?

4 upvotes · 4 comments

 r/murderbot • 2 days ago

Scenes you want to see in the Murderbot TV series!



224 upvotes · 20 comments

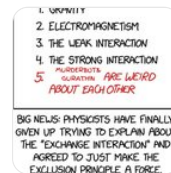
 r/truezelda • 1 yr. ago

Wait... ISN'T there a canon third timeline branch in OoT?

34 upvotes · 29 comments

 r/murderbot • 25 days ago

Murderbot & Gurathin are weird about each other



147 upvotes · 23 comments

 r/murderbot • 13 days ago

This is so murderbot

125 upvotes · 6 comments

 r/murderbot • 9 days ago

Now if my plane is delayed, at least I'll have Murderbot



413 upvotes · 36 comments

 r/murderbot • 21 days ago

Bye bye Planet! See you on Port FreeCommerce.



111 upvotes · 6 comments

"The idea was so painful I dropped to 97 percent efficiency"

1.3K upvotes · 15 comments



16 upvotes · 5 comments

## Baby fauna! Murderbot watches feed vids of cute baby fauna

141 upvotes · 18 comments



r/WoT • 1 yr. ago

**SPOILER**

...I just realised something in a reread of Book 3.

416 upvotes · 56 comments

r/interstellar • 1 yr. ago

**SPOILER**

[spoiler] approaching the ending, it was said that whoever that made "the matrix" was "us". Couldn't wrap my head around that one

22 upvotes · 12 comments

r/LV426 • 1 yr. ago

## Where is all the back story to Alien: Colony War?

8 upvotes · 3 comments

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